

West Sutherland Deer Management Group

General Meeting

held at The Ceilidh Place, Ullapool

on Monday 13th November 2017

MINUTES

Chairman – Gordon Robertson (GR), Assynt Foundation; Secretary – Kirsty MacLeod (KGM)

In Attendance:

Mark White (MW) (Glencassley)
Robbie Galloway (RG) (Tenant, Duchally)
Christopher Gordon (CG) (Duchally)
Roddy Watt (RW) (Merkland)
Kevin Wilson (KW) (Reay Forest)
Michael Ross (Ardvar)
Claire Acheson (CKD Galbraith – Eisg Brachaidh, Inver & Kirkaig)
Michelle Henley (MH) (Scottish Wildlife Trust – Benmore Coigach)
Holly Deary (HD) (SNH)
Ray Mackay (Assynt Crofters' Trust – North Assynt Estate)
Jorine Van Delft (JVD) (Culag Community Woodlands Trust – Little Assynt)
Fiona Saywell (FS) (Culag Community Woodland Trust – Little Assynt and CALLP)
Laura Traynor (LT) (CALLP)
Romany Garnett (RG) (John Muir Trust – Quinag)
Mark Mackenzie (MM) (Keanchulish)
Alistair Campbell (AC) (Bidwells – Keanchulish)
Brendan O'Hanrahan (BOH) (Assynt Foundation – Glencanisp/Drumrunie)
Don O'Driscoll (DOD) (John Muir Trust – Quinag)
James Vestey (Benmore Assynt)
Craig Ross (CR) (Inchnadamph)
Bruce Blackley (BB) (Benmore Assynt)
Marcus Mundro (MM) (Highland Shooting Centre – Ledmore Lodge)
Iain Thomson (Sallachy)
Sue Agnew (SA) (SNH)
Dr Jean Balfour (JB) (Scourie)
Kenny MacLennan (KM) (Badentarbet)
Mark Foxwell (MF) (Scottish Wildlife Trust – Benmore Coigach)
David Davies (Inverpolly)
Rebecca Macleod (RM) (Assynt Foundation – Glencanisp/Drumrunie)

1. The Chairman opened the meeting

GR welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were some new faces, so if everyone could introduce themselves when the estate reports are given.

2. Apologies:

John Venters (Assynt Foundation)
George Vestey (Inchnadamph)
David and Roseanna Bulmer (Keanchulish)
Andy Hibbert (Loch Assynt Lodge)
Mike Daniels (John Muir Trust)
David Allison (Reay Forest)
Alan Balfour (Scourie)

Angus MacKay (Scourie Crofters)
PC Daniel Sutherland
John MacCallum (Ledmore Lodge)

3. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 7th April 2017

The minutes were agreed (proposed by GR, seconded by JB)
It was noted that David McDonnell had since left Inver & Kirkaig Fishings.

4. Matters Arising from the minutes of the last meeting:

Proposed amendments to Constitution (VC had said at the last meeting that the WSDMG Constitution was quite weak in the area of voting arrangements, and suggested using the ADMG pro forma). A draft with changes in red had been sent out with the minutes of the last meeting. This will be re-sent to members for comment/approval. **ACTION KGM**

5. Sporting Rates

GR reported that revaluation notices had been sent by the Assessor's office. If the valuation is below £15,000, you are entitled to small business exemption. Charities receive 100% relief.

This is effectively a land tax, [deer/cull] numbers are not relevant. Objections can be raised with the Assessor.

DD said that if estates are letting land for stalking to a 3rd party, the valuation should be based on the rental figure. Alvie lets at £2.50/ha, yet sporting rates are £5.00/ha. Evidence of what is actually paid is needed to support argument.

KM mentioned that some crofters have received valuation notices.

GR commented that assessors are swamped, and the cost of collection will be more than they will take in.

CG said to bear in mind that the small business exemption might not continue.

AC had a meeting with the assessor in Inverness; they do not have much evidence other than national rates. If you do not object the assessor will assume you are happy with the level of valuation.

HD said ADMG are encouraging objections to be raised.

6. Estate Reports

Cull Statistics for the Group were circulated. An updated copy is circulated with the minutes.

Glencassley – MW. 30 stags shot, average weights similar to last year down 3 or 4 kg. Rut started quick, slowed then up again towards the end. Hind cull will increase this season.

Duchally – RG. 31 stags shot, weights 2kg lighter than 2016. Waiting to work out what to cull in hinds.

Merkland – RW. 28 stags shot. Weights up, but more shot end Sept rather than Oct. Planning 10 to 15 more hinds this year. Poorer condition.

Reay Forest – KW. Stags went well, wet and mild weather. 208 shot in total, of which 103 on southern (WSDMG) beats. 4 sika stags also shot. Stags weights up.

Ardvar – MR. Shot 20 stags. 21 hinds target, but not many about.

Eisg Brachaidh – CA. Duncan shot 25 stags. Hind target 35.

Little Assynt – JVD. 5 stags shot, 4 outside the fence, 1 inside.

North Assynt – RM. 38 stags shot, late. A bit heavier this year.

Quinag – DOD. 26 stags, good condition. Smaller ones not so good.

Glencanisp/Drumrunie – GR. 12 on Drumrunie, 51 Glencanisp. Better condition. Young ones had no fat on kidneys, shot as poorer beasts. Three hinds and one stag dead due to RTCs. Issue to discuss later on.

Keanchulish – MM. 3 stags shot, then stopped due to low numbers. Will look at doing sub group count.

Inchnadamph – CR. 50 stags shot, good. Very wet weather. Planning 50 hinds, condition falling may increase.

Benmore Assynt – BB. 30 stags shot, good condition but tailing off towards the rut. Target 40 hinds, will observe condition.

Scourie – JB. 8 stags shot.

Sallachy – IT. 17 stags shot, slightly up in weight. No hinds to be shot, for the 5th year in a row.

Inverpolly – DD. 20 stags shot. Struggling to find suitable beasts to cull. Could be due to wind, or just hiding, or short due to years of heavy culls.

Benmore Coigach – MF. Figures not available.

Badentarbet – KM. 6 stags shot, younger animals, good enough condition.

7. Sub Group Reports – Deer Management Plans

West (Assynt Peninsula)

(Ardvar, North Assynt, Quinag, Little Assynt, Middle Inver, Loch Assynt Lodge, Kylesku)

RM reported that the DMP was almost ready, and about to be signed off following final discussion on Habitat Impact Assessments.

GR offered his congratulations on finding a way forward under difficult circumstances.

Lochinver South

(Glencanisp, Drumrunie, Inver & Kirkaig, Eisg Brachaidh, Inverpolly, Keanchulish, Benmore Coigach)

DD reported that there was still no DMP. GR confirmed BOH will hand over work to date within two weeks, then the DMP will go out to tender. Asked about the delay, he stated that it was important to look forward, and there were three contractors interested. BOH apologised for not having been able to complete the DMP, due to health and personal reasons. AC asked about timescale. GR confirmed that 50% grant is still there, and a lot of the work has been done. A deadline would be part of the tender process. SNH will be looking for this to happen as quickly as possible and can formally request the Group to develop a DMP using Section 6a of the Deer Act if this does not happen in the near term.

North (Reay Forest, Scourie, Merkland)

KW on behalf of DA reported that there would be a Sub Group meeting in due course to discuss HIA results, and targeted culling on the Reay Forest in light of the data. The data will be available on the website once the file is reduced from 8MB to the 5MB maximum on the WSDMG website.

East (Inchanadamph, Benmore Assynt, Glencassley, Sallachy, Invercassley/Duchally, Caplich, Glenrossal)

IT reported that 180 plots had been monitored, with no notable change from last year. Hind cull would therefore be more or less as per plan. Monitoring was carried out by estate staff.

8. SNH – The Government's Deer Review; the way forward

JB highlighted that all the plans had a different format which could cause confusion going forward, when SNH have to review each DMP against the 14 points on the Act. She looked to SNH for clearer guidance as to how it should look. She said we could revisit the issue [of separate DMPs or one for the whole DMG] but maybe we should discuss it now.

DD responded that there are only two DMPs at present, maybe this could be discussed once we have all four in place.

HD replied that she would not want the SNH review to change what is practical for deer management. Some things can be run as a DMG – training, data collection etc. For those DMPs in place, it will now be about delivery of the plans.

JB hoped that ADMG would be involved. GR confirmed that they would, and there was a meeting on the 23rd which he would be attending.

9. Public Relations Policy

GR had added this important issue to the agenda. The Hill to Grill project delivered by CALLP involving Ullapool High School pupils was a good example. We all have to be ambassadors [for the industry].

10. Scottish Deer Health Survey 2017-19 / Ardgay Game letter

The letter sent to estates by Ardgay Game re. price penalties for damaged or poorly shot venison was discussed. Some carcasses were rejected altogether. Any trace of dirt or contamination must be dealt with by keepers, even though it might mean a gouge being cut out. It seemed to be just Ardgay, not other dealers. GR mentioned that Ardgay picks up carcasses from Glencanisp then returns to deliver venison to Lochinver Larder – it would be good to cut out the middle man, perhaps a collaborative project. KW had heard Braehead were charging some estates to remove their dead. RG said we need to protect our market.

11. ADMG Report

ADMG continue to be involved in all issues. GR feels they are doing a good job on our behalf. Anyone with different views should let him know.

12. CALLP (Coigach-Assynt Living Landscapes Partnership)

FS reported on the Sustainable Deer Management project, now in its second year. 10 people had been trained in DSC1 at Glencanisp in May, all passed. Requested courses included quad bike, butchery, DSC2 and DSC2. Anyone interested should get in touch. KM to recirculate email with details.

ACTION KGM

There will be another Hill to Grill event with UHS next year. Any estates interested in hosting a visit or courses should also get in touch.

HIA training: funding slightly complicated, needs to be clarified with SNH.

GR emphasised the benefits to all of working together.

There followed a separate discussion about the use of copper bullets, KM was concerned that Forest Enterprise were using these. GR asked if there was any Best Practice advice from SNH. HD said that there are disparate views and that ADMG might be able to provide some insight into this.

13. Accounts

Accounts for the year to 30th June 2017 were circulated. Copy attached. DD wondered why the secretarial fee was lower. KGM confirmed this was a timing issue, the final quarter was paid after the year end. Any questions about the accounts should be addressed to the Secretary. These will need to be approved at the next meeting.

Current position: there were some 2017 invoices still outstanding, but there should be enough to pay the ADMG levy in the next week or so based on responses to chase up emails. The ADMG levy has increased significantly; however this is directly recharged to estates. The WSDMG levy has been £1.20 per stag (5 year average) for some time. This covers Secretarial fee (£1000) and sundry expenses, such as meeting room (£125) etc. and now also web hosting fee (£120). This year's income came to £946.20, with some not yet received. There will be just enough to cover this year, thanks to overdue payments from previous years having been collected last year, but it is tight. The group levy amount will definitely need to be reviewed next year.

14. AOCB

KM mentioned the sample boxes on the table, which were for the Moredun Institute research project on E-Coli etc. Members were encouraged to take a couple away. Glencanisp/Drumrunie, Benmore Assynt and Inchnadamph had already taken some. HD confirmed they are looking to get a good geographical spread, and that the project was ongoing for a couple of years.

KC said DA was planning a Best Practice / sharing ideas event at one of the Reay Forest larders, perhaps during the hind season. Please let Kevin or David know if interested. CALLP could work with Reay Forest on this, FS will contact DA, and GR will also follow up.

BOH brought up the issue of RTCs. JV had mentioned in an email some Scandinavian reports on collision avoidance (diversionary feeding etc.) KC felt that most collisions did not involve locals, but visitors to the area maybe going a bit too fast. Raising awareness was felt to be the way forward, more Deer on the Road signs. Large lit up signs such as the one at Rogie Falls are expensive. HD asked if there was a reporting mechanism for this. KGM confirmed that WSDMG does ask for mortality information, and those estates which are having an issue with road kills do report it. BOH suggested that we could gather summaries from Sub groups and right to HC roads department (TEC Services). We could also ask HC for details and numbers of signs. ACTION KGM

GR said deer in Lochinver continued to be an issue of local concern. They were looking at a native woodland grant in conjunction with CALLP to include fencing off the village.

HD came back to the letter sent out by SNH regarding the enhanced approach to deer management. Members should bear in mind the review process – they will be re-assessing in 2019 – and remember that it is about delivery not just formation of plans. If anyone needs any help with direction etc they should speak to Holly or Sinclair Coghill. DD said this would mean implementing as much of plan as possible next year, as actions/delivery is what groups will be assessed on.

KM asked about views on wild boar, as there areas where herbivore impacts are an issue. HD said SNH do acknowledge the severity of that in some areas.

15. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place in June 2018. Potential dates will be circulated 6-8 weeks ahead. It had been agreed at the AGM that future meetings would be held in June and November, with April proving difficult for attendance.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending. Meeting closed at 3:30pm